

[Objections rv 12/14/17]

No Koch on Campus – 12/14/17 Update

Re: Objections to Koch presence at our college

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

As most of you know, our coalition continues to expose and resist the presence of Koch Industries and their Foundations at John Jay College. These efforts began during the tenure of former John Jay College President Travis. Unfortunately, Pres. Travis was disingenuous about the emerging ties between the Koch Foundations and our college. However, during his final year at John Jay, the evidence was unambiguous with Koch Foundation ads on the Crime Report Webpage and the distribution of Koch internships and placements through the College Career Center. Many of us appealed to Pres. Travis but he was unresponsive to our concerns.

Former US Assistant Attorney General, Karol Mason was appointed President of John Jay College on 5/01/17 and she assumed the office on 8/01/17. In September we learned Pres. Mason was hosting a “Smart on Crime” Conference (October 10 – 11) at John Jay College in partnership with Koch Industries and other groups. We requested a meeting with Pres. Mason to express our concerns about any Koch affiliation and our college's mission, direction, and reputation. Pres. Mason granted us a meeting on 10/06/17 where Jerry Markowitz, Phil Yanos, and Matthew Johnson represented our coalition. We presented our various objections (spelled out below) to the Koch Foundation presence and influence at our proud public college. President Mason however informed us that she believed it was in the interest of the students that financial support be accepted from virtually all potential donors. We also appealed to President Mason to establish a committee or task force, along with faculty, to establish guidelines regarding academic integrity and donor influence.

On 10/09/17 our coalition issued an Open Letter to the College Community where we delineated 3 identifiable concerns with the Koch presence at our college, which are contrary to academic integrity and the value we place on justice:

- 1) The Koch record of environmental crimes amounts to human rights violations,
- 2) the Koch well-documented undermining of scientific findings evidenced in their substantial support for climate change denier research, and
- 3) the Koch articulated aims and purpose to recruit and convert students to a political philosophy that is friendly to their financial interests.

Since the release of our Open Letter we pursued engagement with the Faculty Senate on these issues. Also Pres. Mason requested to resume meeting with us regarding the Koch presence at John Jay College. A meeting scheduled for 11/15/17 was cancelled due to Pres. Mason being ill. On 11/16/17 we hosted a symposium (“Teach-In”) where faculty members (**Mary Ting, Phil Yanos, Karen Malpede, and Jose Luis Morin, and Matthew Johnson**) made presentations about various threats to academic integrity posed by Koch influence at our college and other colleges.

We are now scheduled to meet with Pres. Mason again on 12/21/17, along with representatives from the Faculty Senate. As we prepare for the meeting we are continuing to envision other ways to build our campaign to expose and resist Koch influence on our campus. We want to engage more faculty, students, and alumni regarding the Koch influence at our college. If you have ideas for building our campaign please send us the ideas or proposals.

Since the issuance of our Open Letter, through exchanges among our coalition members, researching various sources, and the valuable consultation support from Ralph Wilson @UnKochMyCampus, we have expanded on the 3 concerns noted above and here elaborate the interconnected objections and critiques regarding Koch affiliation with our college. Please review these and offer suggestions or additional perspectives.

a.) In our Open Letter we connected, and correctly named, the Koch long history of environmental crimes as human rights violations. Koch Industries reluctance to pay for the damage they inflict on human life and the environment is linked to their political philosophy, i.e. their opposition to government regulation. And this is also linked to their hostility to science where they funnel monies to support 'research' to undermine the scientific consensus that fossil fuels cause global warming.

b.) The Koch history of criminal and regulatory offending ('rap sheet') is extensive (see https://www.corp-research.org/koch_industries). When considering affiliations and partnerships, it is contrary to our college's commitment to justice to engage with corporate entities with a record like the Koch's. Justice must consider not only how the Koch Foundations might treat our faculty or college-at-large but also their engagement with other (potentially more vulnerable) colleges or individuals. In this regard the Koch record of secret self-serving agreements at other colleges that circumvent tenure rules and related academic policy, their support of voter suppression schemes, their hostility to public education, and particularly public employee labor unions, warrant attention.

c.) It has been suggested that our college can avoid the challenge and responsibility of considering the threats to our mission and reputation posed by Koch affiliation by negotiating some type of 'no strings attached' receipt of financial support from Koch Foundations. There are (at least) two objections to this perspective. 1) In such an arrangement our college would collude with the Koch Foundation(s) attempt to improve their public image without any change in the Koch policy and practice (outlined above) that produced the tarnished image. 2) For the past 30-40 years, the Koch's political/philosophical agenda via ALEC, Americans for Prosperity, the Cato Institute, and other front groups, has been the major driving force in the reduction of funding to education in general and higher education in particular. In New York, and across our nation, an entire generation of young adults (and/or their parents) carry this burden in the form of historically unprecedented educational debt. It is unjust and unwise to lend the good name of our educational institution and endeavors to a group that has worked to undermine the support, integrity, and independence of public higher education. Instead it is in our interest to build alliances with groups who seek to strengthen support for public education.

d.) We must recognize that, to us, John Jay College of Criminal Justice is our professional home. It is where we carry out our vocation as scholars, educators, and researchers. It is where we earn our livelihood, and where we foster and enjoy valuable relationships with colleagues, students, and graduates. But to some interests, such as the Koch Industries, John Jay College of Criminal Justice is a commodity that can be purchased, sold, traded, or discarded. The outstanding reputation our college enjoys is the product of decades of education, research, and development. This should not be, nor ever appear to be, 'for sale'.

Thank you for reviewing this. We appreciate your support and feedback.

Sincerely,

Matthew Johnson, Gerry Markowitz, & Phil Yanos
for the Coalition of Concern about Koch Presence @ John Jay College